

2024 Senate of Maryland Rules

Plain Language Version

These are rules the Senate will follow during the 2024 legislative session. These rules may change.

Senate Office Building

The Miller Senate Office Building is where the Senate committees meet. It is also where some senators have their offices.

- All committee work in the Miller Senate Office Building will be done in person. This means committees will meet in committee rooms, and witnesses should testify in person, if possible. Some witnesses can testify online. The rules for how this will work are below.

Committee Hearings

Bills are new laws the committees consider passing. **Bill hearings** are committee meetings to discuss bills. At hearings, people “testify” about bills. **Testifying** on a bill means telling the committee if you are for or against a bill and why. **Oral testimony** is when you present what you think to a committee. **Written testimony** is when you write down what you think and give it to a committee to read. People who testify are called “**witnesses.**”

- You can watch bill hearings online in real time or after the hearing has taken place. Go to the Maryland General Assembly (MGA) website at mgaleg.maryland.gov to watch hearings.
- If you want to testify on a bill, you must sign up. To do that, you set up an account at MyMGA. To learn more, watch this [video](#). You also need a MyMGA account to send in written testimony.

- If you need an accommodation, call the committee staff. Contact information for each committee is on the MGA website under the “Committees” tab.
- If you need a sign language interpreter, you need to fill out this form: [Request Sign Language Interpretation Form](#). Try to do that at least 5 work days before you need the interpreter.

Committee Rules

- Most committees will have their hearings on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.
- All Senate hearings will be in person in Committee rooms. You can also watch online.
- Committees may limit the number of people who can testify on each bill.
- People have 2 minutes to testify.
- The chairperson of each committee will make rules for their committees. To read the rules for each committee, go to the Maryland General Assembly (MGA) website at mgaleg.maryland.gov. Then click on the “Committees” tab.
- Hearing schedules for each committee are on the MGA website. They are posted before the hearing.

Witness Sign-Up

If you want to testify on a bill, you must sign up online. You should testify in person, if possible. People who testify in person will go first. Committees may allow up to 14 people to testify online. The people who testify online go after people in person. This could change. Online testimony must be live. Recorded videos of testimony will not be allowed.

- **Witness sign up will open on the MGA website 24 hours before the bill hearing.** The 24 hours does not include the weekends. The process to sign up is the same for in person or online testimony.

- Witnesses can sign up from 8 am until 6 pm.
- Witnesses can sign up on:
 - Friday for a hearing on Monday
 - Monday for a hearing on Tuesday
 - Tuesday for a hearing on Wednesday
 - Wednesday for a hearing on Thursday
 - Thursday for a hearing on Friday
- If you do not sign up during the times above, you will not be able to testify. **Late sign up is not allowed.**
- Committees hear testimony on different bills each time they meet. **You can look on the MGA website to see what order the bills will be talked about.**
- When you sign up, you will select either in person or online testimony. The way you testify cannot change after you sign up. For example, if you signed up to testify online, you have to testify online.
- **If you have signed up to testify online, you will receive a Zoom link by 12 pm on the day of the hearing.** Do not share the zoom link. It is just for you. If too many people signed up to testify, you may not get a zoom link. You will get an email letting you know that you will not be testifying.
- Monday, February 5th is the Senate Bill Introduction Date for the General Assembly. Every Senate bill submitted by February 5th will get a hearing. Senate bills submitted after this date go to the Senate Rules Committee. They may or may not get a hearing.
- Some committees may not allow you to testify on a bill if it is a House bill from the 2024 Session and it is the same as a Senate bill that was already heard by the committee.

Zoom Rules

- If you got a Zoom link to testify, you must log into Zoom with your first and last name so committee staff can identify you. If you don't, you may miss your chance to testify.
- Log into Zoom just before your bill is called. You can follow along online so you know when to log in.
- You have to keep your camera on when you testify.
- You should leave the Zoom meeting when the committee chair says there are no more questions.

Voting Sessions

Voting sessions are meetings where the committees discuss and vote on bills. Senators will meet in person. A list of the bills that a committee will vote on will be posted on the MGA website. When possible, this will happen 24 hours before the voting session. You can watch the voting sessions on the MGA website or in person.

Bill Files

Bill files have information about a bill. Each file includes the bill, written testimony, and other information related to the bill.

- After a committee votes “yes” on a bill, it goes to the full Senate for discussion and possible changes. This is called “second reading.” That is when the bill file will be on the MGA website.
- If a committee votes “no” on a bill, it will not go to the full Senate. If that happens, you can get the bill file on the website after the legislative session ends in April.
- If you cannot find the bill file on the website, you can ask for the bill file the day after the bill hearing. You can only get the written testimony and witness list.

Other information will be available after the bill passes the full Senate. To ask for a bill file, call or email the committee staff. Contact information for each committee is on the website under the “Committees” tab.

Maryland State House

The room where the Senate meets in the Maryland State House is called the Senate Chamber. The senators come together in person when they meet in the Senate Chamber. There is an area in the Senate Chamber where people can watch the Senate work. It is called the “gallery.” Some seats in the gallery will be blocked off so everyone keeps a safe distance from each other. Once the gallery is full, no one else can get a seat.

Want more Information?

Go to the Maryland General Assembly website: mgaleg.maryland.gov.

Go to the Maryland General Assembly website: dls.maryland.gov, or

Call 410-946-5400